

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sheridan Safety Policy

Safe Congregation Policy

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sheridan (UUFS) firmly upholds the first Unitarian Universalist principle which affirms and promotes the inherent worth and dignity of every person. In this spirit, UUFS will do everything within its power to ensure the safety of all persons. Some members, friends and visitors may need enhanced protection, including:

- Children and youth under the age of 18 are defined in law as minors. They need enhanced protection because they are at the beginning of their learning adventure and are still growing in mind and body.
- Vulnerable adults may need protection in various circumstances due to their unique intellectual, mental, cognitive, sensory and/or physical incapacities.

Each UUFS member and visitor, young and old, must do his or her part in upholding this policy. The following strategies will be used in implementing the policy.

As a committee of the Board , The Incident Response Committee (IRC), will assist with clarification and resolution of incidents that occur.

I. Safety in Religious Education Programs and Activities.

A. Pre-Service Screening of All Volunteers Working with Children and Youth.

1. All volunteers desirous of working with children and youth must:

a) Have been a UUFS member for at least six months prior to working with children and youth. The length of an individual's participation in church activities will be determined by the religious education professional, with the assistance of the Safety Committee.

b) Present at least two personal references, residence addresses for the past three years, reveal past related experiences, and report any criminal history before working with children and youth (see Appendix C). No person with a history of crimes of abuse, neglect or exploitation involving children will be eligible to supervise minors. Personal references will be filed and maintained by the religious education chair along with . These personal references will be checked by the religious education professional or at his/her request by a designated member of the Religious Education Committee.

2. The Safety Committee will check references and regional background check through fingerprinting of volunteers who are to work with children and youth before they begin to supervise them.

3. Prior to beginning their assignments, all volunteers recruited to work with children will:

a) Read and sign A Code of Ethics and Safety Policy Agreement (see Appendix A and B).

b) Be interviewed by the chair of the Religious Education Committee and members of the Safety Committee.

c) Attend at least one training session on child abuse put on by, or approved by, the religious education professional, in cooperation with the Religious Education Committee. Review child abuse training literature with the RE Committee, prior to interacting with children or youth then attend a training on child abuse identification and reporting when it becomes available. Individual must participate in training to continue working with children and youth.

4. When no approved RE volunteers are available for child supervision, children will remain with their parents.

B. General Provisions Governing Adults Working with Children and Youth.

1. All volunteers working with children and youth will have at least one other adult present with them at all times in any area where children and youth are present, or be in full view of other adults. If a situation arises in which only one adult is present, then the volunteer present is responsible for remedying the situation – either by enlisting the assistance of another qualified adult or by remaining within view of other adults.
2. Volunteers will be responsible for children and youth under their supervision only during designated program periods or organized group activities. The child's parent(s) or guardian will be responsible for the child or youth during all other periods he/she is present on the fellowship property.
3. As a general rule, adults should let children initiate expressions of physical affection such as hugs. Expressions of affection that are generally thought of as appropriate in the family setting, such as kissing and back rubs, should not occur in the church between students and unrelated adults.
4. Restroom use - adult will never be in bathroom with child with door closed unless the adult is the child's guardian.

C. Electronic Communication Guidelines.

UUFS encourages the use of email for electronic communications among religious education teachers, advisors, UUFS staff, and families with children participating in religious education classes and programs and children and youth, subject to the following guidelines:

1. Electronic communications with children enrolled in religious education classes and activities should be used to communicate facts and information relevant to religious education programs and activities only.

a) Elementary School and Middle School Children and Youth:

- (1) Religious education teachers, advisors and staff may communicate with the parents/guardians of elementary and middle school children using email and other forms of electronic communication.
- (2) If it is reasonable and necessary for religious education teachers or middle school youth advisors or UUFS staff to send electronic communication to elementary or middle school students, they should do so in the form of email, with a copy to the child's or youth's parent/guardian.
- (3) The use of text messaging and instant messaging as a means of communicating about UUFS programs and activities with elementary and middle

school students is strongly discouraged, as parents cannot be copied on such communications.

(4) Religious education teachers and staff may not communicate with elementary or middle school children and youth via social networking sites such as Facebook. This rule applies even if the child or youth initiates contact.

b) High School Youth:

(1) Youth group advisors, religious education leaders and UUFS staff members may communicate with high school age youth using email, with a copy to the youth's parent/guardian. The use of instant messaging between the above parties is strongly discouraged.

(2) If necessary, youth advisors, religious education leaders and UUFS volunteers may communicate with high school-age youth using social networking sites such as Facebook, but the church strongly encourages adherence to the following guidelines:

(a) High school-age youth may invite an adult teacher/advisor/UUFS staff member to be a "friend" on social media sites such as Facebook, and teachers/advisors/UUFS volunteers may accept. However, teachers/advisors/UUFS staff members may not invite youth to become "friends" on social networking sites.

(b) Content of communications between high school-age youth and teachers/advisors/staff must be appropriate and consistent with the spirit and letter of this Safety Policy.

(c) Communication between high school youth and teachers/advisors /staff on social media sites should take place on public spaces such as the "wall" on Facebook.

(3) If a posting on a youth's social networking site raises concerns, or a youth seems to be in any danger, youth advisors and teachers should contact the youth's parent(s) and a Safety Response Committee member or the President of the UUFS Board of Directors immediately. If deemed necessary, the guidelines outlined in the disruptive behavior policy should be followed.

D. Education and Training.

1. For religious education teachers and other volunteers working with children and youth, the religious education professional, with the assistance of the Religious Education Committee, will

provide training and written information designed to promote awareness of and prevent child abuse, neglect and exploitation.

2. For the entire congregation, the Safety Committee is encouraged to disseminate information on safety awareness as well as child abuse, neglect and exploitation by holding workshops and distributing written materials on these subjects.

E. Reporting of misconduct with youth or vulnerable person

1. Misconduct should be reported to the Incident Response Committee (IRC) and DFS.
 - a. A separate Incident Response Committee of five will be created and three of the five on the committee will respond to any one reported concern.
 - b. IRC will ask reporter to report to DFS or assist them in reporting, and committee will follow up with reporting to DFS as well including initial reporter's name.

II. Incidents of Confirmed and Alleged Disruptive Behavior.

A. Introduction.

UUFS believes it is important to maintain an environment where openness to a wide variety of individuals and personal viewpoints is accepted and members and friends of the congregation feel free to express their views in a secure atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance. Meaningful worship services as well as effective operations of the church require cooperation and trust among all members and friends of the congregation. When a person's behavior threatens the free expression of ideas or disrupts, or threatens to disrupt, worship services or meetings, however, prompt action must be taken to restore order.

Definition of Disruptive Behavior.

Disruptive behavior includes: (a) major disturbances or credible threats of such disturbances or interruptions in church services or meetings; (b) harassment, threats, or intimidation of individuals; (c) discrimination of any type; (d) the malicious spreading of falsehoods; (e) abusive physical or sexual behavior; and (f) other physical actions which are potentially harmful to others or to property.

B. Responses to Disruptive Behavior.

1. Disruptive behavior or credible threats of disruption will not be tolerated by this fellowship or by any group within it. When disruptive behavior occurs, the affected party(ies) will draw the disruptive person(s) aside and explain why the behavior is disruptive. If the affected party is not comfortable addressing the disruptive party directly, they should report to the Incident Response Committee (IRC). If an affected party does confront a disruptive person and feels it is not resolved, the affected party needs to report the interaction to the IRC. In cases of severe

disruption which threatens personal safety or property, a local law enforcement agency should be called. Authorities should also be called if Wyoming or national law has been broken or if there is an accusation of physical or sexual abuse to a minor or vulnerable adult.

2. If the disruptive behavior continues, or the affected person(s) feel unable to deal directly with the person deemed to be disruptive, the affected person(s) should bring the matter to the attention of the IRC. If a minor is involved, then the religious education professional or chairperson of the religious education committee and parent/guardian should be consulted and included in conversations regarding possible follow-up actions aimed at resolving the incident and preventing future recurrences. In ongoing cases, the IRC, or the religious education professional (in cases where minors are involved), will work with the Board to resolve the problem.

3. When the IRC and the Board of Directors get involved in ongoing cases, a formal letter will be written to the disruptive person by the chair of the Board stating that the behavior must be corrected, explaining in what way the behavior is damaging to the community, and inviting the individual to meet with church leaders appointed by the Board to resolve the problem.

4. If no resolution occurs, the Board will determine the action to be taken. This action could include exclusion from such activities as worship services, religious education programs and committee meetings. The resolution also could involve the formation of a Safe Participation Agreement in accordance with the provisions of B-6 below or other steps the Board deems appropriate. Any Board action will be described in a letter to the disruptive person. In addition, a confidential, written record of all matters pertaining to the disruptive behavior and the steps taken to resolve it will be maintained by the Board Secretary.

5. If, after a month, the person discontinues his/her disruptive behavior and wishes to return to church activities, he/she may make such a written request to the Board.

6. A Safe Participation Agreement is a written document spelling out the actions necessary to bring the accused person into right relations with other members of the congregation and protect him or her from false accusations, while at the same time ensuring the health and wellbeing of vulnerable members of the congregation, including children and youth. The agreement will:

a) Specify the behavioral guidelines the accused will be expected to follow in order to ensure the safety and well-being of vulnerable members of the congregation;

b) Indicate the steps that will be taken to assist the affected individual to become a valued, participating member of the congregation.

c) Spell out the roles and responsibilities of the members of the IRC, the religious education professional, and the Board of Directors in ensuring that the aims of 6-a and 6-b above are achieved.

d) Specify the consequences of failure to abide by the terms of the agreement.

III. Firearms

With the exception of duly-licensed law enforcement officers, no firearms are permitted on the UUSF premises.

If a person possesses a firearm on the premises, the person will be asked to leave immediately. Should that person refuse to leave, the police will be summoned.

Appendix A

UUA Code of Ethics

For Adults and Older Youth Working with Children and Youth

Adults and older youth who are in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering spiritual development of both individuals and the community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurture, care, and support that will enable children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and a spirit of independence and responsibility.

The relationship between youth and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if positive potential is to be realized. There are no more important areas of growth than those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Adults play a key role in assisting children and youth in these areas of growth. Wisdom dictates that children, youth, and adults suffer damaging effects when leaders become sexually involved with young persons in their care; therefore leaders will refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children and youth. Neither shall they sexually harass or engage in behavior with youth that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

Leaders shall be informed of the code of ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases of violation of this code, appropriate action will be taken.

I have read and understand the above statements of position, expectations, and actions.

Name (printed):

Name (signed):

Date:

Agreement to Volunteer with Children and Youth

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Cell phone:

Email:

I have read and understand Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sheridan's policies on keeping children, youth and vulnerable adults safe. These include: [put in by name]

I agree to uphold these principles in my work with Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sheridan children, youth, adults, and families.

I have signed the Code of Ethics statement.

I affirm that I have never been accused of, convicted of, or pled guilty to any sexual crime. I also have not pled guilty to a lesser charge after having been charged with a sexual crime. I have never engaged in any form of child abuse, including sexual abuse. I have never been determined to have engaged in any sexual offenses in any civil, administrative, or ecclesiastical forum or other forum.

If there are any facts or circumstances in my background that call into question my being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, I have met to review this information confidentially with the President and the Religious Education Committee Chair .

Further, I agree to notify the President and the Religious Education Committee Chair immediately should I be accused of sexual abuse, sexual offenses, sexual harassment, or other sexual improprieties in the time that I am working with children and youth in this congregation.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix C

Voluntary Disclosure Statement and Authorization for Release of Information

For Religious Educators and Youth Group Staff and Volunteers

Thank you for your interest in working with the children and youth of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sheridan (UUFS). Our fellowship takes seriously our responsibility of assuring the safety of our youth.

Please fill out this form and give it to the Religious Education Chair. Thank you for your support in providing a safe and secure environment for all of the fellowship's children and youth.

Name

First:

Middle:

Last:

Have you ever used a different name?

5/21/17

No () Yes ()

If yes, please list with dates:

How long have you been attending this fellowship?

Address/Employment

Street:

Town, State, Zip:

Number of years at current address:

If you have not lived at this address for at least 5 years, please list any previous addresses with dates:

What states have you lived in since you were 18 years old?

Home phone:

Work phone:

Place of work:

Number of years at current employment:

5/21/17

May we call your current employer for a character reference?

No () Yes ()

If not, please tell us why:

History

A. Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offense?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please explain:

B. Have you ever been accused of any crimes against a person, including rape, incest, sexual exploitation of a minor, or sexual or physical assault of a minor?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please provide details:

C. Have you ever resigned from employment or been disciplined or terminated by any employer for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please provide details:

D. Have you ever been convicted of any crimes against a person, including rape, incest, sexual exploitation of a minor, or sexual or physical assault of a minor?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please provide details:

E. Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children and youth?

No () Yes ()

If yes, please provide details:

UUFS History and Prior Work with Children and Youth:

List congregations/fellowships you have attended during the past five years:

Name of congregation:

City, State:

When did attend:

List all previous work involving children and youth (list name, type of work performed, person you were responsible to):

Please list two references who are not relatives who have known you for at least three years and who are familiar with your character as it pertain to your experience with children or youth:

1) Name:

Phone:

Address:

Relationship to you:

2) Name:

Phone:

Address:

Relationship to you:

I authorize the to contact references and other congregations/fellowships to obtain information about my background regarding my character and fitness for work with children and youth. I authorize references to provide such information about me. I hereby release and hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information. I also agree to hold harmless this congregation Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sheridan, its trustees, employees and volunteers.

5/21/17

Further, I understand that a member of the board may check the sex offender registry and/or contact the local police for more information about my background.

This information will be available only to those responsible for screening staff or volunteers or participating in a response team, or as required by law.

I attest that the above information is true and correct.

Signature:

Date:

5/21/17